

Aiming High: High Schools for the 21st Century

Delaine Eastin,

Hello, My name is Delaine Eastin, and I am the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

During the next few minutes, we will be introducing you to a newly released document, called *Aiming High: High Schools for the 21st Century*.

Things have changed in education. Recent legislation has established the Academic Performance Index and the High School Exit Exam. We are engaging in a new era of accountability that demands our students demonstrate their knowledge of the California Academic Content Standards.

We've created *Aiming High* as a reference and guidebook that will help facilitate your school's transition to standards-based education, focused on the California Content Standards.

Why are we encouraging standards based education? Well, you and I have become accustomed to high standards in many aspects of our lives. Whether it's clean air, safe tires, or quality, affordable health care, we want to know what the standard is and we want it enforced. Shouldn't education be held to this same level of accountability? (pause) Of course it should, because our children need to be able to compete in our global economy, not just some of them.

As State Superintendent of Public Instruction, I have strongly supported the creation and implementation of standards and accountability in our education system.

Standards-based education absolutely works. It raises the achievement level of students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic background. When students and teachers both focus on clearly defined standards, student performance improves.

This video will introduce you to *Aiming High* and, we hope, will help set you on a course for implementing standards based education in your high school.

Patrick Ainsworth,

1) Hello. I'm Patrick Ainsworth. It's a real pleasure to talk with you today.

In this video we will look at some critical issues facing our high schools, and I will present some ideas for constructing solutions that can be found in the new Department publication, *Aiming High*, and I will encourage you in your process of moving forward with the implementation of standards-based education in your high school.

California's education system is in transition. We are intensely focused on efforts to ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve high academic standards. No longer can we afford to provide purely topic-driven education processes, nor can we be satisfied with subjective and variable assessments. Today's world requires higher, measurable standards of performance.

2) Let's look at some demographic data and trends that have major implications for us as educators:

- About half of California's children live at or below the poverty line.
- 25% of our students, or 1.48 million students, speak little or no English
- Our state ranks 40th in the nation for the number of high school completers by the age of 25.

3) Now, let's look at some of the economic forecasts for the year 2008. By then

- 46% of California's jobs will be high skill jobs.
- 34% of the jobs will require a bachelor's degree or higher, and
- 90% of the jobs will require more than a high school level of literacy and math skills.

4) Given this demographic and economic information, you might ask, "How can children who feel the impact of poverty every day of their lives, and who are unable to communicate in English, participate in this new, sophisticated economy?"

It is arguable they cannot – unless we level the playing field through educational opportunity. We must provide an educational system that clearly defines expectations, and provides diverse methods for support of student achievement. Standards-based education is aimed at doing just that.

5) Standards-based education does not, however, mean that the only focus is on academic content standards. Local standards, such as citizenship and career preparation goals, are also necessary to prepare our youth. Research has identified twelve characteristics of high performing high schools that point to a fundamental need for schools to:

- improve the rigor and depth of instruction,
- organize the school to support instruction,
- create effective support systems for students,
- and assess student progress and create strategic directions for improvement.

A full description of these 12 characteristics can be found in Aiming High.

6) Imagine walking around a high school campus that is engaged in implementing standards based education. What would you see and hear?

- 7) To begin with, you would see that students know what the standards are and why they're important. You would see them taking personal responsibility for identifying which standards pose specific challenges to them and taking the initiative to get the extra help they need.
- 8) You would see teachers targeting, and frequently referring to, specific standards in their instruction and in the assignments, and you would see grades that are an accurate reflection of student progress towards achieving those standards.
- 9) Principals and counselors would be able to explain to you the rationale for implementing a standards-based education system. They could tell you which standards are addressed in which classes, how standards relate to high stakes testing, and could describe an intervention plan for lower performing students.

- **10)** If you ran into any district administrators or board members, they would be able to discuss with you their understanding of the importance of standards-based education and they would speak with a proactive and supportive voice about these increased opportunities for students to learn.

11) We have just seen highlights of a high school that implements standards-based education.

We all know, however, that a primary factor in student success is that interchange that occurs between student and teacher. So we need to align ‘what and how’ we teach with the content standards. This may be the most valuable component of *Aiming High*. *Aiming High* provides a step-by-step process for creating curriculum and assessments that center on the standards. This process is sometimes called backward mapping because it shifts the curriculum development from a topic focus to a standards focus.

12) Embarking on systemic change can seem overwhelming. How do we change a whole system? One way is to identify the key components of a standards-based education system and develop a plan for each of them. *Aiming High* is your resource guide to do this.

13) You might be asking yourself, “Then what do I do next?” It is important for everyone in your high school community to become familiar with *Aiming High*,

And in the last chapter, you will find a self-assessment tool that will help your school determine where it needs to focus its efforts. The rating scores will help you to prioritize what your next steps should be.

14) *Aiming High* will be accompanied by the *Aiming High Tool Kit*, which includes promising practices, how-to instructions, and valuable resources. Both *Aiming High* and the *Tool Kit* are easily accessible online through the California Department of Education web site and are also available in hard copy through the CDE Press.

15) Our ability to prepare young people with a focused, well-rounded education is important not only their own personal futures but to the future of our nation and the world.

We have the opportunity to reinvent our high schools. I invite you to embrace *Aiming High* as your guide to education for the 21st century.

Let’s all aim very high.

Thank you.